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THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 3, 2015

First Fridays debut

The city's keeper of local history is holding an after-hours party, as are other Niagara museums
Page 6

Authors lined up

The Roselawn reading series is returning, and so far a trio of writers has been booked for the season
Page 8

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Farm comes to the rescue



Hundreds of people visited Ringtail Ranch and Rescue during a weekend open house Saturday in Wainfleet. See story on page 2.

ALLAN BINKER/POSTMEDIA NETWORK

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UPFRONT

■ OPEN HOUSE: Ringtail Ranch welcomes hundreds of visitors

Saving the 'most endangered'

ALLAN BENNER
Postmedia Network

Two donkeys wandered through the gates at Ringtail Ranch and Rescue as if to greet the hundreds of visitors that arrived Saturday morning.

They were among a menagerie of animals that attracted the visitors to the 12-hectare of property in Wainfleet.

The open house, held Saturday and Sunday, was an opportunity to cuddle with a lemur, a chinchilla, a kangaroo or various other unusual animals, and help the owners of Ringtail Ranch and Rescue work to preserve an endangered species.

"The black and white lemur right now are the most endangered species on the planet," said Joni Cook, who runs the ranch with her hus-

band Mark Drysdale and their three daughters. "There are only about 400 or 500 of them left in the wild."

While there are many other species at risk of extinction, articles published in scientific journals during the past few years support Cook's statement.

And the plight of wild lemurs is getting worse.

Only a year ago, she said there were about 600 lemurs on Madagascar, the island nation off the east coast of Africa and the only place on the planet that the unique species calls home.

The lemur's jungle habitat on the island is quickly being cut down for farmland, and as their habitat disappears, the wild lemurs are disappearing, too.

"They just keep clear-cut-

ting, they just keep taking land," Cook said.

Meanwhile, she said lemurs are hunted for food, further reducing their population.

"If we don't do something, they're going to go extinct before we know it," she said, as a lemur named King Julian rested peacefully against her chest.

There are about 10,000 lemurs living in captivity, including five that share Cook's home, and she fears that ultimately captive lemurs will be all that remain of the species.

Cook said she's working with organizations around the world to help preserve the species, through captive breeding programs.

"Unfortunately, captive bred are going to be the only ones left," she said.

And if enough lemurs can be bred in captivity, she hopes that they may be able to eventually reintroduce the species into the wild.

"Hopefully, one day we can repopulate," she said.

Cook said she was expecting a lot of guests for the open house.

"We've been getting a lot of response through e-mails, Facebook and everything, and we kind of expected it to be a little crazy," she said.

"That's why we did this over two days. We were hoping it would kind of even out (the crowds) and we wouldn't be so overwhelmed."

But by 10:30 a.m., a half hour before the open house was set to start, she said people were lining up to get in.

As busy as it was Saturday, Cook was expecting even more guests Sunday. And she couldn't have been happier about it.

While enjoying the company of the animals, the numerous visitors at the open house were also helping Cook and her family reach their goal.

The open house was a fundraising event, held to help the family create a 3,000-square-foot facil-



Joni Cook hold King Julian the lemur, during an open house at Ringtail Ranch and Rescue Saturday in Wainfleet.

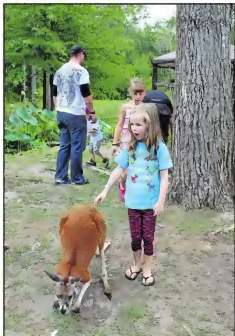
ity where the lemurs can be properly cared for.

"We're working on building a nice big building for them, because right now their facility is our house," Cook said, laughing.

"They play outside through the day in nice weather, but obviously in winter it's a little tight."

In the winter, she said the lemurs in her care can often be found in her living room, relaxing by the fire.

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PHOTOS BY ALLAN BENNER/POSTMEDIA NETWORK

April Crichton made a new friend, petting BamBam the red kangaroo, while visiting Ringtail Ranch and Rescue for a weekend open house Saturday in Wainfleet.



Seth Kinsman pets a chinchilla held by Autumn Lutczyn, as Seth's brother Christopher watches.

LOCAL NEWS

■ **INDUSTRY:** Refinery showcases the work it does



PHOTOS BY ALLAN BENNER/POSTMEDIA NETWORK

Mike Hill and Eric Azzopardi from Vale Inc. were at Vale Centre for Vale Day, giving visitors information about work done at the plant Sunday in Port Colborne.

Vale Centre showcases its namesake

ALLAN BENNER
Postmedia Network

In addition to a chance to use facilities at Vale Centre for free, visitors also had an opportunity to learn about the industry that bears the same name.

Vale Inc. teamed up with the City of Port Colborne and the community's branch of the YMCA on Sunday to sponsor Vale Day, a day of free activities at the health and wellness complex at 550 Elizabeth St.

Company representatives were at the event, giving visitors information about the

work done currently done at a plant that is closing in on its 100th anniversary.

It's the plant that initially put Port Colborne on the map, said safety supervisor Mike Hill.

Although the plant's workforce is smaller than it was decades ago, he said "we still produce quite a bit" at the refinery.

He said the plant continues to refine precious metals and cobalt, and although Vale no longer refines nickel, nickel is still packaged here and shipped throughout the world.

Displays included samples of some of the metals the company works with, such as nickel and cobalt, there were no jars of gold, silver or platinum on display.

Those metals are sold directly to the Canadian Mint, while some precious metals are sent to another refinery in England where the metals are processed for use in things such as electronics and catalytic converters.

As the 100th anniversary nears, Hill said the company is considering the potential of holding an open house at the plant itself at a future date.



Silvana Peever provides a tai chi demonstration using a sword at an open house at Vale Centre Sunday in Port Colborne.

■ I'VE BEEN THINKING

Jesus is not judge

GORD ABRAHAM

Port Colborne Baptist Church

Periodically, I overhear people reply to criticism with "You're not my judge and jury."

A similar complaint about God (often directed at Christianity) goes this way: "God is just a mean spirited, critical, eye in the sky, waiting to pounce on us and judge us for the slightest little bad thing — I won't believe on a God like that."

Unfortunately this is a misrepresentation of God that is perpetuated through opinion and not Revelation. The Revelation of God, in what is called the Bible, tells us that Jesus came in human flesh. He did this because, He came to fully disclose and flesh out, in person

and body, who God was and what He was like. John the Apostle then tells us that this Creator God day set for this Saviour to be The Judge — but it is not now.

Now the choice is ours.

Trust now in Him — His love, grace and mercy offered to you or wait until then to stand before him and answer the question, "What did you do with my Son? No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is Himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made Him known." John 1:18 "so loved the world that He gave His own and only Son (Jesus), that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life." John 3:16

Jesus did not first come to judge and condemn.

God came, in Jesus, not to peer over our

shoulder and jump on us but, to lovingly call us to turn from ourselves and our independence, to trust Him and receive His love expressed in Christ.

That is what Jesus' death on the cross is. God judged sin and rebellion in His Son on the cross.

He wants us to love Him and His Son and to receive His love for us.

The Apostle John goes further and says, "For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him." John 3:17.

Now, before some of you jump to wrong conclusions about what I am saying, hear from the Apostle Paul.

"For He (God) has set a day when He will judge the world with justice by The Man (Jesus His Son) He has appointed. He has

given proof of this to everyone by raising Him (Jesus His Son) from the dead." Acts 17:31

No, right now, Jesus is not all over us, judging us in final condemnation. There is definitely a now, it is the day of grace and mercy for any who turn from themselves and turn in faith to God's Son. This offer of salvation is limited and free and available to any.

Hear what the Apostle John says we must do in response — "He was in the world, and though the world was made through Him, the world did not recognize Him. He came to this world as His own, but His own did not receive Him. Yet to all who did receive Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God — children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God." John 1:10-13



HANDOUT/POSTMEDIA NETWORK

Catharina Wiards is pictured at Vercheres, Que., in May 1970 in this photo by Rene Beauchamp.

Shipwrecks — Catharina Wiards

SKIP GALHAM

For Postmedia Network

The West German freighter *Catharina Wiards* was built at Bremerhaven and completed on May 3, 1969.

The 141.2-metre-long cargo vessel was a St. Lawrence Seaway trader the next year and got into trouble at the Soo Locks on July 29, 1970.

Strong winds prevailed as the ship headed upbound and it was blown sideways at the entrance to the Davis & Sablin Locks blocking both locks for two hours. A Canadian tug came to the assistance and *Catharina Wiards* was realigned and cleared to continue to Duluth.

On May 19, 1972, the vessel caught fire on the Indian Ocean and had to be abandoned by the crew during a voyage from Kobe, Japan, to Durban, South Africa. The hull remained afloat, was found drifting on May 27 and taken to Durban to be unloaded.

Following repairs, it returned to service for Greek owners as *Aristaios* and was back through the seaway as *Silver Bay* in 1979. It became *Trader* in 1986 and sunk in the Red Sea on Nov. 5, 1987, after the engine room flooded during a voyage from Italy to China.

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■ **MUNICIPAL AFFAIRS:** More upgrades for young Vale Health and Wellness Centre

Remaining Vale dressing rooms to get renovations



FRANKI IKEMAN
Postmedia Network

Vale Health and Wellness Centre will see renovations to its 10 remaining dressing rooms.

Port Colborne City Council carried the recommendations to award renovations to a Welland company to the tune of an estimated \$45,000.

The decision last week came after a report by the engineering and operations department outlining the outcome of a pilot project that saw two of the dressing rooms renovated.

The report said staff sought to address ongoing dressing room spatial concerns raised over the first two years of operating the two arenas at Vale.

The decision raised ongoing concerns from members of council that the centre still lacked some accessibility necessities.

When reached later, Ward 2 Coun. Angie Desmarais said she and fellow Ward 2 Coun. Yvon Doucet have been raising these concerns for quite a while now.

Those concerns mainly revolve around a long, slanted hallway through the centre that lacks handrails. Desmarais also said that the

hallway can be slippery, and she would like to see some kind of grip put in to give people who aren't sure-footed added security.

Desmarais also said she would like to see some kind of bright markers on stairways to allow people with sight challenges to use the stairs rather than the elevator.

These accessibility retrofits are not required under Ontario Building Code, and therefore were deemed unnecessary at the time the centre was built, Desmarais said.

"I don't care about what the code is requiring, I care about what the people need," she said.

Desmarais did say that city staff had done an "excellent job" taking care of concerns over automated doorways that had been brought up previously.

Engineering and operations director Ron Hanson said that a number of accessibility upgrades have been done already and that the department will be looking through the other concerns raised now.

Hanson said right now there are no set aside funds to complete those upgrades.

But Desmarais said if it's about money, then council should find

some money to get the work done.

"That's where I start to question our priorities," Desmarais said.



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■ **HISTORY:** First Fridays series launches next week

Museums hosting after-hours parties

FRANK IEMAN
Postmedia Network

The Museums of Niagara Association is attempting to reach out to new audiences by launching First Fridays, a series of after-hours soirees that will run the first Friday of the month September through December.

Four museums — Port Colborne Historical and Marine Museum, Niagara Historical Society Museum in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Niagara Falls History Museum and St. Catharines Museum and Welland Canals Centre at Lock 3 — will each host a themed night.

The party is kicking off with a Bootlegger Ball at the Port Colborne Museum on this Friday at 7 p.m.

The Gatsby-era themed ball will have food, drinks,

live music and activities. The museum's exhibit will also be open.

"We chose the Bootlegger Ball because it's also a fundraiser for next year's exhibit on rum-running," said Abbey Stansfield, education programmer at the museum.

Rum-running, Stansfield said, is engrained in the history of the lakeside city.

"There's a big history, because we're a port town, of doing that (rum-running to the states)," she said.

"Speakeasies were the thing to go to because Prohibition was on during this age and so you couldn't legally sell alcohol," Stansfield said, "so they would invent these speakeasies where people were illegally selling alcohol and people were just having a great party."

She said the decor will be



FRANK IEMAN/POSTMEDIA NETWORK

Abbey Stansfield at Port Colborne Historical and Marine Museum, where a Bootlegger Ball will be staged next Friday night.

fitting of the 1920s: big and bold.

Following the Bootlegger Ball will be St. Catharines' Rock the Boat Lock Party on Oct. 2, the Moustache

Bash at the Niagara-on-the-Lake museum on Nov. 6, and Spring Fever at the Niagara Falls museum on Dec. 4.

"What's different about it is that it's a partnership between

different museums throughout the region," said Carina Magazzeni, event co-ordinator of First Fridays.

Magazzeni said she hopes that on top of drawing in new

audiences, the event series will draw people to museums outside their own communities.

"Museums are spaces of vital social interaction and cultural activity," Magazzeni said, adding she hopes the fun, after-hours events will clear up misconceptions that museums are places to be quiet.

"There's just something about being at a museum at night that makes it exciting and freeing," she said.

Port Colborne restaurant The Smokin' Buddha will be catering all of the Friday night events.

Tickets for the Bootlegger Ball can be purchased in advance at the library or museum or at the door. The cost to attend the ball is \$10.

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Heather Price

■ **MUNICIPAL AFFAIRS:** Recommendation by fire chief to uphold current burning bylaws carried

Hope for backyard fires in Port Colborne extinguished

FRANK IEMAN
Postmedia Network

Any hope that the City of Port Colborne would soon allow open-air burning was extinguished at last Monday's city council meeting.

In a unanimous vote, councillors approved a recommendation by fire Chief Tom Cartwright to essentially maintain the status quo.

In a report submitted to council, Cartwright made the recommendation to update the current open air burning bylaw to use a section of the Ontario Fire Code that came into effect in January.

Cartwright said the code is "pretty much identical," with the exception of a new section which allows for Technical Standards

and Safety Act authorized propane and gas fireplaces.

"I'm pleased with council and the debate," Cartwright said later. "And I'm glad that it went the way it did."

The item was brought forward for extra discussion, during which many councillors spoke to feed-back they had received from residents.

Many councillors said that they received more comments from residents that were against allowing open-air burning, and that many of those residents cited health and safety issues.

"Everyone who wanted the ability to have a backyard fire cited the same reason: fun," said Ward 2 Coun. Angie Desmarais.

And although many councillors agreed that limiting people's

ability to have small, controlled fires didn't seem fair, the over-riding idea that health and safety ought to come first prevailed, and council noted it is difficult to create a bylaw that would deal with people who are simply inconsistent.

Cartwright said Port Colborne Fire and Emergency Services enforces the bylaw on a complaint basis only, excluding extreme circumstances of out-of-control fires or burning of certain materials, such as plastics.

He said typically the fire department will issue a notice of violation the first time, and subsequent complaints may see fines levied against repeat offenders.

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The minimum wage is going up.

Here's what you need to know:

Minimum Wage Rate	June 1, 2014 to September 30, 2015	As of October 1, 2015
General Minimum Wage	\$11.00 per hour	\$11.25 per hour
Student Minimum Wage: Students under 18 and working 28 hours per week or less when school is in session, or work during a school break or summer holidays	\$10.30 per hour	\$10.55 per hour
Liquor Servers Minimum Wage	\$9.55 per hour	\$9.80 per hour
Hunting and Fishing Guides Minimum Wage: Rate for working less than five consecutive hours in a day	\$55.00	\$56.30
Hunting and Fishing Guides Minimum Wage: Rate for working five or more hours in a day whether or not the hours are consecutive	\$11.00	\$11.20
Homeworkers Wage: Employees doing paid work in their own home for an employer	\$12.10 per hour	\$12.40 per hour

On October 1, 2015, the general minimum wage will increase to \$11.25, from the current rate of \$11.00. The minimum wage will be reviewed on a yearly basis. The rates will be published by April 1st and come into effect on October 1st of the same year.

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Bringing life into the future

■ **LITERATURE:** Ann-Marie MacDonald, Hazel McCallion and Nino Ricci to speak at Canadian Authors Series

First three authors announced for Roselawn series

Postmedia Network

Author, news anchor and playwright Ann-Marie MacDonald will be returning to Roselawn Theatre in Port Colborne, launching the community's Canadian Authors Series.

MacDonald, host of CBC TV's *Doe Zone* and author of *Fall on Your Knees*,

The Way The Crow Flies, and her new novel, *Adult Onset*, will discuss her work at the Roselawn stage, Tuesday, Sept. 8.

The series continues Thursday, Oct. 29, when former longtime Mississauga mayor Hazel McCallion visits Roselawn to discuss her book *Hurricane Hazel, A Life With A Purpose*.

McCallion was Mississauga's mayor for 36 years. She was first elected in 1978 and retired in 2014.

On Thursday, Nov. 26, Nino Ricci, the author of *Lives of the Saints*, *In A Glass House*, *Where She Has Gone* and *The Origin of Species*, will be at Roselawn, reading from his new book, *Sleep*.

It's the first book in nine years for the author.

Series host Putzy Madronich, has teamed up with volunteers and supporters to bring the

annual series back to Roselawn Centre, an author's series that has been described as among the best in Canada by publishing industry representatives.

In preparation for the show, the authors' books will be available for purchase at Don and Lisa Gram's Crew's Quarters store on West Street, and the authors will also have books available for purchase at their readings.

People will also have an opportunity to meet the authors following the readings, along

with wine and craft brew tastings, samples of foods prepared at local restaurants and music performed by Soundscape.

Season passes for all seven readings are available for \$160, while single event tickets can be purchased for \$30 each on the night of the readings, if they're still available.

More information is available by e-mailing canadianauthorsseries@gmail.com, calling 905-834-8315 or at the canadianauthorsseries.ca or www.facebook.com/TheCanadianAuthorsSeries.

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■ ENVIRONMENT

Money available for improving Great Lakes

GRANT LAFLECHE
Postmedia Network

It's never been used in Niagara, but a provincial government program is offering thousands of dollars to local groups that want to improve the health of the Great Lakes and associated waterways.

The Great Lakes Guardian Community Fund is currently accepting applications for funding. It offers up to \$25,000 for local nonprofit groups, along with First Nations and Metis organizations who want to engage in projects that will protect and enhance the lakes and watersheds.

Eligible projects include those that protect water quality, improve wet lands and beaches or protect habitats and species.

St. Catharines MPP Jim Bradley said



JIM BRADLEY

the fund was established while he was minister of the environment. If a project receives funding in 2015, it must be completed by 2017.

We did it so that local groups, community groups or boy scouts or groups like that could get funding, Bradley said.

The fund has been around for since 2012, but only one Niagara group, the Niagara River Restoration Council, has received funding.

Bradley said the program is a "good fund, and I encourage those groups that are interested to apply."

For more information go to www.ontario.ca/environment-and-energy/great-lakes-guardian-community-fund.

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LOCAL NEWS

FUNDRAISER

Cross-country journey supports SickKids

MARYANNE FIRTH
Postmedia Network

Troy Dowhaniuk found inspiration in Kaos.

The family dog taught him the meaning of unconditional love. She also taught him how quickly cancer can take a life.

There was only a one-month span between the time the 10-year-old rottweiler was diagnosed with the invasive disease and the point at which Dowhaniuk had to say goodbye in December 2013.

It was the St. Catharines resident's first encounter with cancer and, in his mind, it changed everything.

After the death of Kaos, Dowhaniuk felt he could no longer take life for granted and became determined to make a difference in the world.

"I was not appreciating what was right in front of me," the 30-year-old said, adding he was to be able to make the choices in life that have led him to where he is today.

"There are three-year-old kids who get sick and have no chance to make good or bad decisions," he said, adding no child should go without experiencing life to its fullest.

Wanting to do his part, the avid cyclist decided a cross-

country bike tour was a fitting way to raise funds for children facing not only cancer, but other serious illnesses.

"I want to give other people the opportunity to grow up and do something I'm doing now," he said.

On June 1, he began his trek across Canada in support of SickKids Hospital in Toronto and in memory of Kaos.

Beginning in Tofino, B.C., he has since travelled to Sydney, N.S., and will soon begin the final leg of his journey in Newfoundland.

Though he initially planned to be on the road until Sept. 30, Dowhaniuk plans to be back in St. Catharines by mid-month.

He's been striving to do a minimum of 90 kilometres per day, but has had some marathon moments that have surpassed the 200-km mark in a 24-hour span.

"It really puts you ahead, but you're exhausted the next day," he said by phone during a brief pitstop.

"By then you're ready for a hot shower, a plate of pasta and bed."



HANDOUT/POSTMEDIA NETWORK

Troy Dowhaniuk, of St. Catharines, is nearing the end of his cross-country bike tour to raise funds for SickKids Hospital in Toronto.

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LOCAL NEWS

FUNDRAISER

Cyclist inspired to help others after dog stricken with cancer

From previous page

While he's still a ways away from his \$50,000 goal, sitting at \$7,100 as of last Tuesday, Dowhanluk said he's been left in awe of the generosity of strangers across the country, many of whom have invited him to for a hot meal and offered a place to stay.

"The trip has been unreal. Meeting people had just been fantastic," he said, adding the support he's received has helped to get him through the difficult days.

Dowhanluk has bit a few snags along the road, including an inability to share his story and collect donations in Quebec due to the language barrier.

"It was a setback, not being able to get my message across, but it is beautiful

there," he said.

The wind, however, has unexpectedly been the most difficult part of Dowhanluk's trip.

"It can break you emotionally and physically," he said, adding it can make for both an intense and long day of riding.

But the good of the journey has far outweighed the bad.

"The trip has changed my view on life," Dowhanluk said.

"I didn't think it would change my values as much as it has."

While he was previously running restaurants in the local hospitality industry, he believes a change is on the horizon as a result.

"I don't know what I'm

going to do with myself," he said. "But I'm not sure running restaurants is for me anymore."

Rather than planning his next career move, Dowhanluk is more focused on making a trip to the SickKids oncology department upon his return.

He intends to host a homecoming fundraiser once back in the Garden City in an effort to boost donations for the cause.

To make a donation or for more information, visit www.projectsthatmatter.ca.

To follow the remainder of Dowhanluk's journey, visit www.facebook.com/projectsthatmatter.

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Postmedia Network multi-media journalist Bill Sawchuk speaks with Niagara Regional Police chief Jeff McGuire on Aug. 27.

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In The NEWS



We are so very proud to announce that Morgan Proulx is the recipient of the 2015 Mark Guilbeault and Associates Dance Sponsorship. We had many candidates but Morgan was chosen for her exceptional community involvement, grades and her commitment to dancing. Many thanks to Ava Dalcourt and everyone at Dance Expressions Inc. for always inspiring our youth to be the very best they can be. Keep up your hard work Morgan, and stay enthused!

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IMPORT NEWS

Discipline changes for cops?

BILL SAWCHUK
Postmedia Network

Niagara's police chief would like to suspend officers accused of serious wrongdoing without pay — and he might just get that option.

The provincial government announced earlier this month it is planning to revamp legislation that guides policing in Ontario. It would be first changes to the Police Services Act since 1990.

One of the options under consideration would allow police chiefs to suspend officers without pay if they are facing dismissal for on-duty conduct, or charged with serious criminal offences while off

duty.

"As it stands now, the chief has no authority to suspend an officer without pay," McGuire said. "I can suspend them and tell them they can't come to work, and I can take away their power as police officers, but I can't stop paying them."

"There are some cases where I'm talking to my neighbour at the end of the driveway, or members of my family, and I can't explain why."

Former constable Dean Rudge is a case in point — though McGuire wouldn't comment on specific cases.

Continued on next page

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■ POLICING

'We raise an eyebrow when one of our colleagues is arrested'

From previous page

Rudge was eventually convicted of giving confidential police documents to the Hells Angels motorcycle gang. He was paid to sit at home while his case wound its way through the courts, including a retrial after the Crown appealed Rudge's initial acquittal.

Rudge is serving a four-year penitentiary term.

McGuire was at the courthouse in Welland when the judge sentenced Rudge and filed papers to suspend Rudge's pay immediately.

"The base pay for a police officer in the period from Rudge's arrest in April 2007 to the time of his conviction would have amounted to \$540,417. That calculation is based on contract agreements with wage increases that saw his salary climb to \$85,787 from \$73,483.

"We have 705 sworn officers currently on staff, and 99.9 percent of those officers will never enter the disciplinary process," McGuire said. "They come to work, do their job and uphold their oath."

Chief Priest, president of the Niagara Region Police Association, which repre-

sents front-line officers, said his organization is not opposed to suspension without pay for serious misconduct off duty.

"That's been our stance since Day 1, but there have to be safeguards, and we haven't seen them in writing," Priest said.

"We raise an eyebrow when one of our colleagues is arrested. We expect to be held to a higher standard because of the job we do. We don't want to work with someone who doesn't uphold the oath to protect and serve. But we are also entitled to due process.

"We don't want the chief to be able to suspend just who he likes."

The proposed changes to the Police Services Act could also address some other issues. They include advancements in technology, police interactions with vulnerable individuals such as those suffering from mental health or addiction issues, and enhanced expectations about oversight and accountability of law enforcement.

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Cop board survey will cost taxpayers \$25,000

MARYANNE FIRTH
Postmedia Network

An unintended Niagara Police Services Board survey meant to solicit community input on the force will come with a \$25,000 price tag.

Used to help shape a provincially-mandated three-year business plan for the Niagara Regional Police, the document was created by a third-party consultant and designed to gauge residents' perceptions of safety, crime, community priorities and police performance. But since its introduction to the public last week, the document's credibility has been questioned and accusations made by the association representing rank-and-file officers about personal political agendas influencing its content.

It was at the July 23 meeting that the authority to directly hire a consultant to complete the business plan, including the survey, was delegated by the board to the chair and vice-chair, as well as the committee chair overseeing the project.

The contract, which did not go to tender, was later awarded to DPM Consulting, board executive director Deb Morton said. The company has not been previously used to complete the NRP's business plans, she added.

While \$50,000 was budgeted for the 2016-18 business plan, Morton said the estimate provided by DPM came in at \$42,500, including \$25,000 for the community input survey.

The mandated business plan is completed in conjunction with the police service, but is the board's responsibility to create, police Chief Jeff McGuire said.

"Over the last four or five business plans, the service was responsible for all the external consultations. I have a corporate analyst on staff, Dr. Paul Divers, who has handled that portion of it for us."

At the July 23 meeting, the board made "an amendment to their bylaws, which put the external consultation piece into the hands of the board," McGuire said.

"We have to gather information together in order to get the plan done, but as to the details (about the survey), I would have to direct

any questions to the board. It is their survey. They hired the people to do it. They put the survey out. We will just have to see where it goes."

Police board chair Bob Gale declined to answer any further questions pertaining to the survey.

"We've done enough interviews on this," he said by phone, adding Morton had also "answered enough questions" on the topic during previous conversations with Postmedia Niagara.

Gale said he intended to provide this newspaper with DPM's proposal outlining project details, but was awaiting consent from the head of the company, who was out of town.

He declined to provide any further detail.

Postmedia Niagara has yet to receive the document.

It was Chief Priest, president of the Niagara Region Police Association, who last week lambasted the survey, which he said "lacks credibility" and contains "personal agenda questions of the chair and vice-chair (Andy Petrowski)."

Since that time, Priest said he's spoken to many people in the community who "just cannot under-

stand why the Police Services Board have done what they've done, why they did not do a proper survey."

The questions are phrased in such a way that they will not provide the information needed to properly form an effective business plan for the police service for the next three years, he said Friday.

"It's very poorly laid out," Priest said of the document, which he believes "won't give us any idea of how to concentrate our efforts to police the community."

As an example, Priest referenced one question included in the survey that asks respondents to rank, out of 20 crimes, what they believe are the top ten issues in Niagara.

The way the question is worded, as well as the answering structure, will not provide information on which issues are most pressing in different parts of the region, he said.

"The surveys in the past have always allowed us to provide proper business cases," he said, calling it "scary" for officers that an unsuitable plan could be created as a result of the skewed information collected.

"The public will be getting upset

and my members will have to respond to why there are inadequate patrols and inadequate responses," he said.

"It's going to make it hard for us to do our jobs."

Gale previously told Postmedia the board wanted to ask the "hard questions" intended to make the police force better.

"I'm proud of the questions we've asked. It isn't a vanilla survey. We didn't want vanilla questions and vanilla answers."

"Some of the questions are stand-out ones that all the police forces ask, but if we are going to do a survey, but if we are going to do it right — and ask some tough questions."

The consultant will report directly to the board regarding the business plan, which is expected to be finalized by the end of the year.

The survey, said to be both anonymous and confidential for respondents, is available online until Sept. 28 at niagarapolice.ca.

maryanne.firth@postmedia.ca
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— with files from Bill Sawchuk,
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**IN
BRIEF**

Big Fix update given

At last Monday's Port Colborne city council meeting, Ward 2 Coun. Angie Desmarais gave an update on Port Colborne Feline Initiative's (PCFI) Big Fix program.

Desmarais said that with the exception of seven cats, the first quadrant of the project has been completed. This means 47 cats have been spayed/neutered in the East Village area of the city.

PCFI is now starting the second quadrant of the project. A public meeting will be held at the Port Cares Reach Out Centre on Nickel Street at 7 tonight.

Residents in the East Village are welcome to attend the meeting where they can get further general and registration information on the Big Fix.

Animal control bylaws need tweaking: Desmarais

Ward 2 Coun. Angie Desmarais brought up the issue of Port Colborne's animal control bylaws at last Monday's

city council meeting.

Desmarais said some tweaking is required to put some control on the number of cats residents can own, citing a few residences with numbers of cats in the teens, and one with about 50 cats.

Commenting later, Desmarais said she understands that talking and limiting people when it comes to their pets is sensitive, and that any changes to current bylaws need to be done correctly and fairly to all involved.

She said she would like to see a report and recommendations come to council by the end of the year, but said that timeline is doubtful, and expects some time in 2016 to be more realistic.

Water meter replacement

Port Colborne city council voted last Monday to begin negotiations with Neptune Technology Inc. for a water meter replacement project that would see 5,250 (mainly residential) water meters replaced, likely by the end of this year.

The city's department of engineering and operations will begin to negotiate pricing with Neptune and bring a report back to council for financial approval as soon as possible.

Engineering and operations director Ron Hanson said of 6,000 water meters in need of a retrofit, 750 have already been completed.

Hanson said updated technology of new radio frequency meters will allow for staff to analyse water data faster and more effectively.

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LOCAL NEWS

UTILITIES



MANDOWN/POSTMEDIA NETWORK

Water pooling on Nancy's driveway in Port Colborne after a cracked pipe on her property began leaking in April 2015.

Homeowner feels she's getting soaked by the city

MICHELLE ALLENBERG
Postmedia Network

One Port Colborne taxpayer feels she's been left high and dry by the municipality after a watermain break in April. She has had no water at her home since then.

Nancy, who did not want her last name used for this story, has been living with a friend in Welland since May.

Correspondence shows city workers turned off the water April 24 after observing a water leak outside Nancy's house.

When Nancy returned home to find no water service, she informed the city the leaking water was coming from her sump pump, as was normal.

"I didn't have this issue until the city started jumping on the bloody watermain,"

Nancy said, adding that "with the ground being so soft it popped up by my house."

She said when workers returned to restore water, they damaged the valve, causing further problems.

City workers were called back to the property April 28 by Nancy and her neighbours due to flooding. The city turned off her water again, and said flooding was due to a break in the sub-grade pipe which is on her private property.

After failing to get help from numerous agencies in Niagara, Nancy, who is on the Ontario Disability Support Program, pursued legal action, but after an assessment it was determined the city was not responsible for the broken pipe.

"Based on our investigation... we see evidence of negligence resting with the city and we are respectfully denying your client's claim for damages as submitted," stated Cunningham and Lindsey, an

insurance adjuster, in a letter to Nancy's lawyer Varthan Arulsundaram from Justice Niagara in Welland.

Nancy and her sister turned to Port Colborne Ward 3 Coun. Bea Kenny for assistance after reaching a dead end.

"She tried a few agencies for help, but they didn't have any funds to help. They didn't have funds for her," Kenny said.

Kenny visited Nancy's home and saw the break was on Nancy's property. If there is damage on someone's property the city is not allowed to fix the problem, it is private property, Kenny said.

"We've confirmed damage on her side, she agreed it's on her side. It needs to be rectified by her," said Ron Hanson, director of engineering and operations in Port Colborne.

Nancy said she doesn't have the money to fix the pipe. "It's a severe health issue, not being able to use your toilet... not being able to wash anything or sanitize anything,

it's inhumane is what it is. I thought Canada was a better country, where they wouldn't let you suffer like that," she said.

Port Colborne Mayor John Maloney responded.

"Well certainly, yeah as a citizen who was in distress it is a question of at what point does the municipality involvement take place. There are other agencies that could fulfil this... residents cannot live without water," he said. Kenny said the pipe could have been fixed a long time ago and that Nancy shouldn't have had to live without water for this long.

"She was very adamant she wasn't paying. She has not been co-operative — at the beginning. She really believed the work the city was doing on the street caused the break. She was just stubborn. She should have approached the city from the beginning," Kenny said.

The only way Kenny could help was to bring the issue before city council.

On Aug. 24, councillors approved a method of payment. Nancy said the city would pay a contractor to fix the pipe and she would have the cost added to her taxes which are paid with her mortgage.

"(There is) concern that we want to make her home habitable once again as best we can, but as I said the city is not a social service agency and has to be very careful when dealing with this," the mayor said.

"This is a rather extreme situation... it is a one off situation. It is not our function as a municipality, but it is our function as concerned citizens to make her house habitable again," said Maloney. The repair bill is estimated to be about \$2,260. The work is expected to be completed in mid-September.

An additional fee of \$425 will be levied by the city to restore water service to Nancy's house.

Because a portion of water bill includes fixed costs, Nancy in the meantime has continued to receive a water bill.

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■ HISTORY

Pioneer living returns to Wainfleet this weekend

MICHELLE ALLENBERG
Postmedia Network

Wainfleet's past will be showcased this Labour Day weekend when Marshville Heritage Festival returns.

Margaret Robertson, chair of the 27th annual festival, said there will be a variety of handmade crafts available for people to purchase. Expect to see textiles, crafters, woodwork, jewelry and other symbols of the 19th-century way of life.

The festival was designed to showcase what life was like for farming families in Wainfleet between 1850 and 1890.

There will be a section where the Niagara Antique Power Association will put on a demonstration to show the lifestyle of farmers during this time period.

Robertson said the buildings in the township's heritage village will be open and have things going on inside. Blacksmiths and woodworkers will be giving demonstrations — many of them hands-on for visitors.

There are 15 restored buildings in the village for people to get a better idea of how people lived during the 1800s.

People can also look forward to some

action from the 2nd Lincoln Militia which will be doing a re-enactment of the War of 1812 during the festival.

As well as farming and war re-enactments, there will be car shows and other entertainment.

Robertson said she is looking forward to many of the entertainers.

"They are all good. We have Craig Douglas, who is a comedic

juggler who brings in a big crowd," she said.

The festival is run by volunteers and no one is being paid except the performers.

"There are about 400 volunteers all dressed in period outfits and it takes all year to prepare for," Robertson said.

Tickets will be available for purchase for a canoe raffle as well as an Amish quilt raffle.

The festival is open 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Sunday through Monday. Admission is \$6 and free for children under 10. On Saturday there is a special \$5 price for seniors.

There will be free parking located near the festival and a free people mover to transport people to the entrance.

michelle.allenberg@sunmedia.ca

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FILE PHOTO

A blacksmith hammers a piece of metal during Christmas at Marshville Heritage Village celebrations in Wainfleet.

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